

... Exit Richard Helms

✓ It isn't official yet, but our usually impeccable official sources tell us that Richard M. Helms will soon be stepping down after six years as director of the Central Intelligence Agency, presumably to take on a new and important assignment in the Nixon administration. Whatever his future job may be, he will be sorely missed in the one which he is leaving.

✓ Of the men who have headed the CIA since its inception in 1947, Helms stands out as the one truly professional intelligence expert. His career in the spy business covers a span of 29 years, beginning with a four-year stint with the Office of Strategic Services in World War II. After transferring to the newly-formed CIA, he served as deputy director for plans under General Walter Bedell Smith and ✓ John A. McCone, previous CIA heads.

As director, Helms brought a coolness of judgment and great administrative talent to one of the most sensitive and difficult jobs in the federal government. Under his leadership, the performance of the agency, in contrast to past years,

has been highly discreet and, to the extent that such things can be judged, effective. It is suggested that his departure from the CIA may have resulted in part from a dispute within the intelligence community regarding the deployment of Russian nuclear missiles. Yet from all the available evidence, his assessment of the world situation — and particularly in Indochina, where the CIA has borne heavy responsibilities — has been remarkably accurate.

The highly essential business of intelligence-gathering, being necessarily secret and to some minds distasteful, requires the kind of public confidence that Helms has been able to provide. As President Johnson remarked at his swearing-in ceremony: "Although he has spent more than 20 years in public life attempting to avoid publicity, he has never been able to conceal the fact that he is one of the most trusted and most able and most dedicated professional career men in this Capital." As director of the CIA, Richard Helms has fully justified that assessment.